

Moran Introduces Legislation to Enhance Hunting Opportunities, Promote Rural Economies

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran recently introduced legislation to increase hunting opportunities for sportsmen and stimulate rural economies in Kansas. The "Open Fields" legislation provides incentives for farmers and ranchers to voluntarily make their land accessible for outdoor activities like hunting and fishing.

"Anyone who has driven through a rural community in the fall has seen the 'Welcome Hunters' signs in front of main street restaurants and local motels," Moran said. "But more and more, reduced access to hunting ground is threatening the future of the sport and the dollars it brings to rural America. This legislation will help continue our nation's outdoor heritage, boost rural economies and provide additional income to our farmers and ranchers."

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Act, commonly known as "Open Fields," would assist states in expanding and developing access programs that encourage private landowners - particularly farmers and ranchers - to open their property to the public for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. The modest payments generate extra income for participating landowners.

This legislation will expand and continue the success of Kansas' Walk-In-Hunting Area (WIHA) program. In a state where approximately 97 percent of the land is private, WIHA has opened more than one million acres in Kansas to public hunting. Though popular with hunters and landowners, interest in enrolling land has exceeded available funding.

"Expanding access to areas available to hunt, even for those on a budget, is the only way we can ensure that the great rural tradition of hunting in Kansas will continue," said Barth Crouch, Kansas Regional Biologist for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever. "This will also help with getting young people outdoors and learning about the real world firsthand by interacting with nature as a participant, not just an observer. I applaud Congressman Moran and Senator Roberts for their continuing support for the hunting tradition."

Kansas Senator Pat Roberts has introduced the "Open Fields" legislation in the Senate. The legislation has been endorsed by a long list of sportsmen, conservation and farming groups, including the National Rifle Association, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. Moran is a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee and a member of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus.

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